Culture and Civilization in the Middle East

ARABS AND IRANIANS IN THE ISLAMIC CONQUEST NARRATIVE

MEMORY AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN ISLAMIC HISTORIOGRAPHY, 750–1050

Scott Savran

ROUTLEDGE

Arabs and Iranians in the Islamic Conquest Narrative

Arabs and Iranians in the Islamic Conquest Narrative analyzes how early Muslim historians merged the pre-Islamic histories of the Arab and Iranian peoples into a didactic narrative culminating with the Arab conquest of Iran.

This book provides an in-depth examination of Islamic historical accounts of the encounters between representatives of these two peoples that took place in the centuries prior to the coming of Islam. By doing this, it uncovers anachronistic projections of dynamic identity and political discourses within the contemporaneous Islamic world. It shows how the formulaic placement of such embellishment within the context of the narrative served to justify the Arabs' rise to power, whilst also explaining the fall of the Iranian Sasanian empire. The objective of this book is not simply to mine Islamic historical chronicles for the factual data they contain about the pre-Islamic period, but rather to understand how the authors of these works thought about this era.

By investigating the intersection between early Islamic memory, identity construction, and power discourses, this book will benefit researchers and students of Islamic history and literature and Middle Eastern Studies.

Scott Savran obtained his PhD from the University of Wisconsin in 2011. Dr Savran's research focuses on identity-based discourses in early Islamic historiography.

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For my father

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Preface

This book is based on my dissertation which I completed at the University of Wisconsin in 2011. My idea for this study first came about during the summer of 2004, during which time I spent in Damascus reading Arabic chronicles. Though I was originally a student of Mamlūk studies, my colleague, Martyn Smith, convinced me that we read together al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar*, and that we focus on the section of pre-Islamic antiquities. I was drawn to this author's chapter on the Sasanian empire, which cites pre-Islamic Persian texts. Whose "voice" was speaking to us, I wondered, al-Mas'ūdī or the composers of these ancient texts? Furthermore, what did the Sasanian era mean for al-Mas'ūdī, and how did other Muslim historians, living in different times and places, think about the pre-Islamic period? These questions led me down the path of this current study, which analyzes early Islamic historiography on the relationship between the Sasanian empire and the tribes and states of the Arabian peninsula and Iraq through the lens of contemporaneous discourses and processes.

Many people have helped and supported me through the course of this project. While space limitations prevent me from mentioning everyone by name, there are several individuals whom I would particularly like to acknowledge. I would first like to thank my graduate and undergraduate advisors, David Morgan and Rudi Lindner, who have supported and inspired me throughout my education and in writing this book. From the University of Wisconsin, Uli Schamiloglu has also been a supportive figure throughout my career. Next, I would like to express my gratitude towards Tayeb El-Hibri, who kindly read a draft of my introduction, and provided invaluable advice. Sarah Savant, Greg Fisher, Conor Whately, Michael Bates, and Ignacio Sánchez graciously shared their scholarship with me, which I found most helpful. Likewise, the faculty and students participating in the History Reading Circle at Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan, provided a much welcome assessment of my early chapters. While writing both my dissertation and this book, I benefited from my communication with Boaz Shoshan, Mahmoud Omidsalar, Parvaneh Pourshariati, Shaul Shaked, Reuven Amitai, Julia Rubanovich, Michael Morony, Elizabeth Urban, D. Gershon Lewental, and the late Patricia Crone, who gave me useful feedback on my dissertation.

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Abbreviations

BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
CHALAB	Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: ‘Abbasid Belles-Lettres
CHALUP	Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period
CHI	Cambridge History of Iran
EI	Encyclopaedia of Islam
EIr	Encyclopaedia Iranica
IJMES	International Journal of Middle East Studies
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
PSAS	Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies

1 Introduction

The Battle of al-Qādisiyya (AD 636) was the decisive victory for the Muslim-Arabs over the Sasanian empire, opening up Iran for conquest and resulting in the eradication of the Sasanian dynasty. In his historical chronicle, *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) details numerous reports (*akhbār*) of the embassies which the Arabs sent to the Persian[1] camp in the days prior to this battle. His main source for these accounts is Sayf b. 'Umar (d. 809), a Kufan transmitter of traditions who has been noted for his literary embellishment and questionable reliability.[2] Each of these meetings proceeds roughly as follows: The Arab ambassador, entering the Sasanian camp alone, is presented as the *imago* Bedouin warrior. He wears tattered clothes, bears ramshackle weapons, and is generally unkempt. The Iranians, in contrast, are arrayed in full ceremonial formation. The soldiers display their glistening armor and impressive weaponry, and the nobles don their finest brocades and diadems. At the end of a spread carpet lined with cushions, the Sasanian general Rustam sits atop a golden throne. The Arab, however, pays no heed to the Iranians' display of pomp and proceeds to approach Rustam. Rustam then begins the dialogue by disparaging the Arabs for their poverty and offers to give them some meager provisions if they would return to their land. The Arab ambassador, however, remains composed and dignified despite this treatment, and eloquently responds by chastising the Persians for their decadence, proclaiming the message of the Prophet Muḥammad, and offering them the ultimatum of conversion, paying the *jizya* (poll tax), or facing open war.[3]

These reports' formulaic emphasis on the contrast between the Arabs' poverty and the Iranians' imperial splendor renders their veracity suspect. What is furthermore intriguing is the fact that al-Ṭabarī affords far less coverage to the Arab-Muslims' early campaigns against the Roman (Byzantine) empire than he gives to the conquest of Iran. This is unusual considering the wealth of conquest literature (*futūḥ*) on the Arabs' Western campaigns to which al-Ṭabarī would have had access. These works exhibit similar tropes of contrast in their portrayals of encounters between Arabs and representatives of Roman empire.[4] Why therefore did al-Ṭabarī devote so much attention to Sayf's dubious rendition of the al-Qādisiyya embassies, and the conquest of Iran in general? How might the social and political circumstances in which he lived have shaped his attitude

towards these events? What messages, if any, was he trying to convey to his reader through his portrayal of these embassies, and how might we compare his agenda, or the angle he approached this history, with that of his sources?

Al-Ṭabarī's chronicle belongs to a genre of Islamic historiography consisting of comprehensive world histories composed between the late ninth and early eleventh centuries.[5] These works vary in their coverage of the civilizations of the pre-Islamic world, yet on the whole, the lion's share of their focus is on two groups: the Arabs and the Iranians. Across this genre, the great civilizations of Greece and Rome, India, and China are frankly not afforded the same depth of coverage in terms of their internal dynamics as the Arabs and the Iranians.[6] Considering the fact that Islam was born in the Arabian peninsula, it is of course, natural that Arab history should be afforded a prominent position in any Islamic historical work. As far as the Iranian orientation of these texts is concerned, this is a reflection of these historians' social context. Most of the universal chronographers were of Iranian origin. (Al-Ṭabarī hailed from the region of Ṭabaristān, south of the Caspian Sea). Moreover, they were writing in an era witnessing the dominance in the central and eastern Islamic lands of Iranian political enterprises and a concomitant wide-scale resurgence of Iranian traditions and culture.

The universal chronicles of this era therefore evince an attempt to merge the histories of the pre-Islamic Arab and Iranian peoples into a universal cycle of aggregate accounts culminating with the rise of Islam. As a watershed moment bringing these two civilizations together, it is no wonder then why the events surrounding the seminal Battle of al-Qādisiyya receive so much attention in these works in comparison to their depiction of the Byzantine conquests. Yet, this streaming of two distinct traditions into a single historical consciousness was no easy task, especially considering that the transmitters these historians relied upon lived in a different social and political context from theirs and, no doubt, thought about these events differently. So for example, while Iranian culture certainly exercised a strong influence on the early 'Abbasid Iraq of Sayf b. 'Umar, and the Arab genealogist and antiquarian Hishām b. al-Kalbī (d. 819), it had not yet reached the same degree of dominance there and elsewhere in the *Dār al-Islām* (Abode of Islam) as it had by the time we arrive at the universal chronographers' era. How then did Muslim writers of history, living in different times and in different contexts, come to terms with and give meaning to the Arab conquest of Iran? The present study addresses this question.

Approach: collective memory, identity construction, and historical narrative

The main analytical frame of this book is that of historical "memory" and the way early Muslim scholars living between 750 and 1050 remembered the pre-Islamic Arabs and Iranians, as well as the Muslim conquest of Iran. This study further investigates the ways in which this recollection reflects their own social context. In approaching this topic, the modern historian can benefit from social scientific scholarship on memory without forcing theoretical judgments on the

case of Islamic history. I hope that the insights scholars of memory have to offer can better refine an approach for assessing how early Muslim historians made sense of the past. The idea of studying memory as a sociological phenomenon that is distinct from history originates with Maurice Halbwachs, though his ideas are strongly influenced by Émile Durkheim's notion that knowledge itself is a social construct. Halbwachs coined the term "collective memory," which he argues is the means by which a social group (such as a family, religious organization, profession, socio-economic class, political faction, etc.) becomes aware of itself and how individuals define their membership to that group. To this end, groups construct a past which demonstrates their continuity and cohesion through time, thus validating the group's collective identity.[7]

Halbwachs' conception of a socially constructed collective memory has been developed in recent cross-disciplinary scholarship approaching the subject of memory from various angles. Combining sociological and historical approaches, the work of the Egyptologist Jan Assmann is among the most prominent. Assmann builds on Halbwachs' idea that memory is an essential ingredient for identity construction and group belonging. He argues that:

> Memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level. Identity, in its turn, is related to time.… This synthesis of time and identity is effectuated by memory.… Remembering is a realization of belonging, even a social obligation. One has to remember in order to belong.[8]

What Assmann refers to as "cultural memory" (memory which "preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity" and which is generally defined by wide temporal horizons) is reflexive, in that groups project their ideal self-image, values, and sense of unity into *a* past that they construct. Assmann also underlines the fluidity of cultural memory, arguing that it is in a continuous state of being reconstructed according to changing social conditions and historical circumstances.[9]

Furthermore, rather than distinguishing between history and memory as does Halbwachs, Assmann articulates a historiographical approach to the study of memory which asks not just *what* is being remembered, but rather seeks to contextualize *how* the past is remembered. The objective of this method, which he refers to as "mnemohistory," is to uncover what a society's memory can reveal about its own circumstances, concerns, and biases. To this end, in assessing textual historiographical data, mnemohistory seeks to uncover the "hidden agenda" of the author/transmitter.[10]

The trend of analyzing Islamic historiography as a product of constructed memory has its roots in the "source-critical" tradition of modern Western scholarship on Islam. Around the turn of the twentieth century, Julius Wellhausen devised a classification scheme grouping early Muslim historians into regional "schools." He was highly critical of the members of the Iraqi school (particularly Sayf b. 'Umar) for their alleged sloppy chronologies, propensity to

weave romantic tales, and for the telltale signs of tribal and partisan biases which their works exhibit.[11] Yet, whereas Wellhausen was interested in distinguishing between "good" versus "bad" sources for the purpose of reconstructing actual events, Ignaz Goldziher aimed to uncover what the *ḥadīth* (traditions) revealed retrospectively about the later generations of religious scholars who compiled them. Goldziher argued that most of the *ḥadīth* (including the orthodox canonical traditions) are anachronistic fabrications, since they reflect political and religious discourses circulating among Muslim scholars, which had been projected onto the time of the Prophet.[12]

The "skeptical" approach to Islamic historiography peaked in the 1970s with the appearance of studies challenging the entire corpus of Islamic historiography and religious texts, including the Qur'an itself. By comparing non-Muslim texts with Islamic sources, scholars like John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone, and Michael Cook boldly argued that "Islam" itself was a later fabrication of the early 'Abbasid era projected upon what was, in actuality, an Arabian monotheistic movement of the seventh century which did not see itself as a distinct religion.[13] While the skeptical view continues to be expressed by some scholars,[14] the general trend in recent decades has been towards a measured approach, accepting that there is, in most cases a "kernel" of recoverable historical truth in early Islamic sources on the formative period.[15]

Concomitant with the recent boom in memory studies scholarship, the past few decades have witnessed a proliferation of research analyzing the theme of memory in early Islamic society from a variety of angles. Some recent studies on this subject are general in scope, encompassing a range of topics related to Islamic historical memory.[16] Others have continued the trend of studying the origins and development of Islamic historiography, asking what were the key themes, discourses, and concerns shaping how early Muslim authors thought and wrote about the past.[17] A recent trend among some scholars in this regard is to approach Islamic historiography on the Prophet, the formative community, the early conquests, and historical events that reach to the mid-ninth century as a multi-layered and allusive construct. By so doing, they have revealed the potential of literary/textual analysis for unlocking social and cultural meaning contained within the texts that is not readily discernable through a positivist reading of them. (More will be said on this approach below). Similarly, various recent studies have examined the formative Islamic period as a polemical ground for messages that served social and cultural anxieties of a later Islamic society.[18] However, for all this scholarship centered on the topic of "representation" in Islamic history, there has been little attention given to examining what the early chroniclers say about the pre-Islamic era (particularly that of Iran), and what the accounts of this period reveal about the social contexts and political circumstances of early Islamic society.

A significant exception to this is Sarah Bowen Savant's recent monograph which analyzes how early Iranian historians assimilated the history and traditions of pre-Islamic Iran into the canon of Islamic historiography by selectively "remembering" and "forgetting" their own peoples' past. Savant charts the

process over several centuries whereby Iranian history was gradually incorporated and given meaning in a broader Islamic context. The purpose of this was to validate an Iranian-Islamic identity.[19]

This book contributes to recent scholarship on Islamic memory by analyzing what early Islamic historiographical perspectives of the pre- and formative Islamic period can tell us about the ways in which identity and alterity were constructed in the early Islamic world in different times and places. Identity is a widely analyzed term in modern social scientific scholarship, with sundry connotations. The rubric of "identity" proposed by this book examines the intersections of ethnic, cultural, tribal, and religious awareness. Yet we leave our definition loose, so as to not overstep our bounds in imposing modern concepts of belonging onto our sources. For it would be foolhardy to imagine that the ways in which individuals in our authors' milieu understood terms such as *'Arab* (Arabs), *a'rāb* (Bedouin), *Furs* (Persia/Persians), *qawm*/*ahl* (both translate as "people" and are applied in different contexts), and *umma* (nation) fit perfectly into the categories created by social scientists in the last 50 years. At the same time, while I am careful in my application of modern social scientific terminology, I also accept certain ubiquitous axioms regarding identity that have withstood the test of scrutiny and analysis across the board in a variety of research settings. The first is the intimate connection between memory and identity, as we noted above.[20] The second commonly held theory regarding identity postulates that groups tend to define themselves in bifurcating terms of centrality and normality in stark contrast to the "Other," i.e., the inferior, subaltern, or rival constituency. "Othering" is a power process to the extent that the representing group assumes the normative position and reserves the right to represent or "create knowledge" about the other group. To this end, the dominant group (or group claiming superiority at least) will often define the "Other" as the embodiment of those strange, negative characteristics which it seeks to distance itself from; its "shadow" in the Jungian sense.[21] Stuart Hall, whose definition of identity derives from Derrida's concept of *différance*, describes the process of "othering" in identity formation:

> Identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the "positive" meaning of any term – and thus it its "identity" – can be constructed.… Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render "outside", abjected.[22]

Finally, as they are differential, identities are never fixed, but like collective memory, are fluid, changing over time in accordance with different social and political circumstances.[23] In what follows, I outline how these features of identity come into play in early Islamic historians' portrayals of the pre-Islamic Arab and

Iranian peoples. Before doing so, I will first describe the vehicle which brings identity and memory together, and by which these historians operated – narrative.

The Islamic conquest narrative

A key contribution of Savant's study lies in its depth, first demonstrating how Muslim historians integrated a range of antecedent traditions (bibilical, Arab and Iranian legend, epic), and then examining Islamic memory of more recent events and themes occurring around the time of the Arab conquest of Iran. This book focuses more directly on memory of the Sasanian period as a whole. My argument for a Sasanian focus is based on reading this ancient period as a critical transition in the overall drift of Islamic historiography, and the move from the end of the biblical/legendary era and the rise of Islam. "With the Sasanians we emerge into historical time," writes Julie Meisami, alluding to the fact that what came earlier in the Iranian-Islamic historiographical tradition is the stuff of myth, an elliptically portrayed era occupied by legendary kings like Jamshīd and Afrīdūn, and their respective dynasties—the Pīshdādians, the Kayānians, and the Ashkānians. Whereas when we arrive at the Sasanian period in the chronicles, we are dealing with real historical events, still tinged with myth, but nonetheless more clearly focused in the minds of our historians.[24] Echoing Meisami, 'Irfān Shahīd writes that this period

> was the most recent pre-Islamic past and, unlike the remoter world of the Parthians and the Achaemenids, was still fairly vivid and alive in the minds and the records of the Persians and Arabs of early Islamic times when al-Ṭabarī wrote his *Tārīkh*.[25]

Indeed, in Islamic memory, events occurring during this time are causally related in a direct way with the rise of Islam. To this end, Muslim historians depicted the Sasanians as having a fate that was intimately intertwined with that of the Arab peoples. This can particularly be seen in the historiographical emphasis on the interdependency between the Sasanians and their client state, the Lakhmids, as I shall demonstrate later in this study.

This book's main theme is that the Sasanian era, as it is portrayed in Islamic histories, witnessed the unfolding of a didactic narrative, which I have termed the "Islamic Conquest Narrative." I hope to show that Islamic chronicles depict the Arab conquest of Iran in the seventh century as the climax of a drama between Arab and Iranian civilizations that starts in earnest with the rise of the Sasanian dynasty. A narrative is a "discourse that conveys a story." That is, it does not just refer to the story itself, but the interactive process of how that story is conveyed, which involves a discourse between the narrator and the receiver/interpreter. In terms of structure, narratives tie together events into a causal sequence. Events in narratives are interrelated, occurring as a consequence of previous events, and "gaps" are filled in between them to create a coherent continuous flow. To this end, narratives have their own time, which is determined

by the sequential relationship of events in them. Narrative time speeds up or slows down depending on the level of "density," i.e., the amount of attention afforded to representing an event, topic, setting, character, etc. Density, in turn, is usually proportional to the relative importance of what is being described to the overall purpose of the story. For all narratives have meaning. They exhibit a conspicuous trajectory whose purpose is to validate (or invalidate, depending on the perspective of the narrator), solve a problem, or provide an explanation.[26]

This book's conceptual basis depends largely on Hayden White's theory of narrativization, which emphasizes the fictionalizing component in historical writing. For White, all history writing is essentially an act of storytelling. He argues that historical narratives "are as much *invented* as *found*" by historical narrators who employ techniques of fictional writing to construct a story which blends "historic" with "mythic" elements. According to White's theory, events within historical narratives are "emplotted" into a story-like format, organized into dramatic stages and conforming to a plotline, replete with characters playing archetypical roles, emphasis on particular semiotic motifs, use of rhetorical and literary devices (wordplay, metaphor, foreshadowing, irony, etc.), and variation in tone and density of descriptions in accordance with the plot's demands. Through this fictional representation, historical narratives provide their readers with hermeneutic signposts guiding them on how the story will unfold and how they should interpret the events and processes within them.[27] White provides the example to elucidate his argument that no event is intrinsically tragic, comedic, instructional, etc., but it is rather the historian who configures an event to be this way by weaving it into a narrative that relies upon telltale fictional-literary techniques and plots that are culturally conditioned, making them readily recognizable to the intended audience.[28] From this angle, narrativization is thus a process that gives meaning to historical events and helps groups and individuals make sense of their past.

Scholars of memory have, moreover, theorized that narrative is the bridge linking collective memory and identity construction, to the extent that narrative serves as the vehicle by which a group imagines *its* history. That is, groups construct their identity by assembling memories of their past into the form of a "master narrative." Master narratives structure collective memory by providing it with order. They tell the story of the group by explaining its origins, its progression through time as a distinct social entity, and in some cases foreshadow the group's future. They furthermore adhere to a plot, in which key events in the group's history are transformed into formative episodes, and historical reality "intermingles" with legend and fantasy. To this end, master narratives make use of fictional devices to project contemporaneous ideologies into the group's history, thus creating a dialogue between past and present. Finally, just like memory and identity, the master narrative itself is an ever evolving organism, changing to meet the social needs of the group and to reflect its current circumstances. The purpose of the master narrative is thus to provide members of a group with a sense of a shared past and to aid them in delineating their group's boundaries by defining what their group is about, and what it is not.[29]

I referenced above the trend analyzing Islamic historiographical memory and representation from a narrativist perspective. It is therefore suitable to briefly outline this scholarship in order to situate my analysis and approach within the framework of these studies. Recent studies applying literary analyses to early Islamic historiography are indebted to the seminal study of Albrecht Noth. His work identifies and classifies common schemata and themes within the texts, which he argues were back projections that clearly reflect the contemporaneous ideologies, interests, and literary styles of the historians and their respective milieus.[30] For her part, Marilyn Waldman applies speech-act analysis to Abū'l-Faẓl Bayhaqī's (d. 1077) *Tārīkh-i Bayhaqī* (also known as the *Tārīkh-i Mas'ūdī*) to uncover the "unconscious patterning" of the text, which itself reveals a layer of meaning transcending the author's deliberate intentions.[31] The past two decades has witnessed a diverse array of scholarship analyzing the literary nature of narratives of the Prophet and the early conquests, asking what literary and rhetorical strategies did Muslim historians employ to project commonplace ideological stances of their own contexts in their representations of the formative period.[32] On a theoretical level, a current discussion among scholars assesses the fictional dimension of various forms of early Islamic writing, including historiography (*ta'rīkh*), religious texts, and *adab*, which is roughly equivalent to the *belles-lettres* genre in Western literature.[33]

However, the most prominent representation of narrative methodology in recent years lies in Tayeb El-Hibri's works on the historiography of the Rashidun and early 'Abbasid Caliphates. El-Hibri shows how Islamic historical sources portray both periods as part of an ongoing divinely regulated drama, whose conspicuous narrative-literary structure, weaving together various plots and subplots of Islamic socio-historical discourse, serves both stylistic and didactic ends. From this angle, the narrative of the Caliphates is as much of an edifying, moralizing drama as it is a work of history.[34] As an inquiry into the Islamic narrative of the pre-Islamic period, I humbly hope that this book will uncover a prequel to the narratives El-Hibri analyzes by elucidating themes of distant memory, which were formative in shaping the discourse among early Muslims on how the *umma* came to be, and what its future trajectories are. To this end, in what follows, I will outline the major themes of the Islamic conquest narrative.

The first important feature to recognize about the narrative this book analyzes is that it is marked by watershed moments, each signaling a critical transition in the plot, ultimately leading to the finale, the victory at al-Qādisiyya and the subsequent Arab conquest of Iran. For our story, the critical turning points occur in the context of *encounters* between the Arabs and Sasanians.[35] This book analyzes reports of key meetings between representatives of these two groups. These are often portrayed as being interconnected, resulting from previous encounters. Moreover, they conform to formulaic patterns, which I shall describe in detail below. To this end, I intend to show that the plot unfolds in such a way as to make the final encounter, the Arab conquest of the Sasanians, appear inevitable and even necessary to the contemporaneous Muslim reader. How this was

achieved as well as what these encounters looked like is a matter of the second defining characteristic of our narrative, its didactic function.

The purpose of the Islamic conquest narrative was to relate a lesson (*'ibra*). Throughout this introduction, I have referenced a wide body of scholarship analyzing, in one form or another, how early Muslim chroniclers fashioned historical narratives of the formative period in such a way as to lend validation to contemporaneous agendas and ideologies. These studies make manifest the indelible kerygmatic or teleological quality of Islamic historiography, demonstrating that early Muslim historians portrayed the polities of late antiquity, the prophecy of Muḥammad, the emergence of the *umma*, and the latter's early military successes, culminating with the major conquests of other nations as interconnected, and part of God's plan. The purpose in so doing was to legitimize current Muslim hegemony by projecting its inevitable rise to supremacy into the past.[36]

The Islamic conquest narrative is therefore teleological, in that it forecasts the fall of the Sasanian dynasty and its replacement by Islam as the unfolding of the divine plan. At the same time, it is moralizing to the extent that the *dramatis personae* in our drama play an active role in bringing about the fate of their respective civilization by acting in a way that is either pleasing or displeasing to God. This is where the didactic retrojection of anachronistic Islamic values comes in—the Muslim-Arab conquest of Iran serves as an ethical lesson for the contemporaneous reader. To this end, we may note some pervasive themes and patterns of a moralizing quality that convey the inevitability of this transition to the reader.

All such themes are rooted in the differential character of the Islamic conquest narrative. In the chronicles, Arab and Iranian civilizations are presented in Manichean terms to be the stark contrast of each other, each one defining itself by a set of values which the other rejects. The conception of "Arab" and "Persian" as diametrically opposed, culturally homogenous units is a projection from the Islamic period, as I shall discuss in the following chapter. Iranian civilization is portrayed as the embodiment of imperial splendor, social stratification, and high culture; whereas the Arab tribes and states of the *Jāhiliyya* are equated with the Spartan life of the desert and the rugged, egalitarian values of the Bedouin.[37] In the context of encounters between these two peoples, the Arabs appear as the protagonists whereas the Sasanians come off as the villains. For example, in the Sasanians' treatment of the Arabs, they are depicted as stingy tyrants. One commonplace trope is reports that describe how, in response to the Arabs' migrating into the fertile regions of Iraq and southern Iran, the Persians would either offer them some trifling gifts to return to their lands, or go on cruel campaigns against them, punishing the Arabs excessively. Another theme is their haughty treatment of Arab ambassadors, whom they disparaged, often assaulted, and to whom they made pompous displays of their ceremonial and grandeur. Still another is the Sasanians' overconfidence in battle with the Arabs, relying on their numbers, sophisticated weaponry and tactics, and then the ironic aftermath of their defeat when their luxuries cannot save them.

Such defaming stereotypes of the Iranians are set in stark contrast with positive images of the Arabs. The chronicles tend to highlight the Arabs' straitened circumstances as a source of virtue and steadfastness, whereas the Persians' excessive wealth brings about their moral decay. The Arabs are both munificent and brave, as can be seen in depictions of their battles with the mighty Sasanians. At the same time, the cultural achievements of the Arabs are emphasized. In this respect, their eloquence (*balāgha*) is a pervasive trope. For example, in accounts of Arab embassies to the Sasanian kings and officials, the Arab ambassadors are portrayed remaining composed in front of the Sasanians' intimidating ceremonial and dismissive treatment of them, and impressing the latter with their wit. Finally, laudatory descriptions of the kingdoms of the Yemen and the Lakhmids of al-Ḥīra, whose cultural accomplishments are often set in comparison to that of the Iranians, achieve a similar affect.

The overarching pattern of our narrative's plotline becomes clear with each successive encounter, as the Arabs become ever more confident in their dealings with the Iranians, while the discrepancy in morality between the two peoples become increasingly stark. By the time we arrive at the time of the conquest of the Sasanian empire, the Arab warrior-tribesmen (*muqātilūn*) are depicted as paragons of moral perfection, combining the quintessential toughness of the Bedouin with the Islamic values of piety and religious devotion, showing a willingness to sacrifice their lives for God's cause. By embodying such virtues, they appear as religious heroes, in many respects heritors of the *simplicitas* exemplified by the desert dwelling ascetics and martyrs of the late antique Near Eastern faith tradition, who likewise lived an austere lifestyle and stood up for their faith against a tyrannical, worldly power.[38] At the same time, the processes causing the Sasanian house's degeneration were at this point irreversible, and the moral depravity besmirching the once proud royal family becomes acute at this point in the narrative, making the Sasanians' fall to a morally superior enterprise appear natural.

Like any aesthetically pleasing narrative, ours is enhanced by literary and hermeneutic devices. On the one hand, devices like detailed descriptions of physical settings, peoples' appearances, feelings, gestures, and of various other minutiae; along with verbatim dialogules and monologues are utilized by our chroniclers for their *mimetic* quality, giving their reports the pretension of reality, putting the reader into the position of a personal observer of the historical situations they are reporting.[39] But there are also tropes whose specific function is to point the reader in the direction of the narrative's plotline, aiding him/her to comprehend its underlying message. For instance, underscoring the ubiquitous theme of contrast in the setting of the encounters are illustrations of Iranian royal paraphernalia and markers of the Iranians' wealth, particularly thrones, cushions, and brocades, craftily juxtaposed with stereotypical images of the Arabs' desert life, such as their turbans, camels, their simple sustenance, and their crude weaponry. To this end, we may imagine the chroniclers' portrayal of Khusraw II Parvīz, enthroned with his hanging crown,[40] receiving Arab emissaries; or of Rib'ī b. 'Āmir, with his shoddy weapons, eloquently replying to

Rustam's taunts[41] as *lieux de mémoire*, to the extent that they are symbolic images representing, in condensed form, a broader historical process and its constitutive lesson, etched into Islamic collective memory through the instrument of narrative.[42]

The device of foreshadowing likewise pervades our narrative, in which one encounters visions and omens heralding the rise of Islam and the Arab conquest of Iran.[43] There are even several instances in the texts where the Sasanians cryptically acknowledge their fall to the Arabs. Conversely, one witnesses in these reports pagan Arabs of the *Jāhiliyya* who display an uncanny familiarity with monotheism and Qur'anic precepts, and conform to a mode of behavior that betrays indelible Islamic ideals. At the same time, the chroniclers' emphasis of contrast between the noble, rugged Arabs and the haughty Iranian rulers and officials, conveys a sense of irony in the unfolding of history, in as much as these humble, yet dignified inhabitants of the desert, *not* the mighty kings of any of the *'ajamī* (non-Arab) civilizations, should be honored to receive the seal of the prophets and the mandate for the conquest of the world.[44] The sum effect of this and other forms of literary embellishment that I shall analyze throughout this book produces a mood of predetermination for these two peoples so inextricably linked by fate. Indeed, it is as if the outcome is already known before the conquest. The stereotypical, if not predictable, patterns of the encounters in our narrative show that the Sasanians' forfeiting of power to the Arabs is the outcome of their own hubristic behavior. Because of their pompous displays of wealth and luxury, and because of their maltreatment of the Arabs, their ultimate fall appears both inevitable and justified to the reader. In this way, the Arabs' conquest of the Sasanian empire serves as a moralizing lesson against imperial hubris, excessive wealth, and tyranny. At the same time, portrayals underlining the Arabs' piety, toughness, cultural achievements, and their longevity as a people serve to justify their rise to rule over neighbors who possessed a glorious imperial tradition and sophisticated culture.

Yet, also like any other narrative, ours is more than just a story, as it also involves a discourse between narrator and receiver. In this regard, the final important aspect to note about the Islamic conquest narrative is its intertextual layering. For, as we've discussed, just as a group's cultural memory and identity are subject to continuous reconstruction, so too does its master narrative develop between and sometimes within generations. The changing dynamics of a group's self-awareness and social conditions are reflected in the stratigraphy (to use archaeological language) of its master narrative, and if available, can be charted by the intertextuality of its historical sources, be they oral or written.[45] The stratigraphy of the early Islamic historiographical tradition has long been a topic of interest among students of Islamic history for the reason that no specimen of the earliest generations of Islamic historiography remains extant, forcing scholars to rely on what is cited in the chronicles dating from no earlier than the ninth century. Thus, when we read al-Ṭabarī's history, we are not just reading "al-Ṭabarī" but rather a composite of those chains of transmitters (*isnād*s) and sources he cites. In an effort to reconstruct these earliest layers, some historians

have devised classification schemes dividing Islamic historiography temporally into stages,[46] and geographically into schools representing different cities.[47] Some scholars, particularly those focusing on apologetic memory, have analyzed how a specific historical subject or episode has been interpreted from generation to generation.[48] Others have concentrated on the theme of transmission itself, asking by what means early Muslim scholars preserved and passed on knowledge to successive generations.[49]

Such analyses must first assess the level of "agency," asking whether an author/narrator could (and to what degree) shape the material attributed to him, or was he simply a passive transmitter of older material. They must then differentiate between the intentions of the author (if applicable), how his work would have been received/interpreted by readers in his own social context, and then how readers living both in different areas as well as among later generations might have interpreted that particular work, all the while taking account any potential affect on transmission and reception stemming from changing social circumstances. Older material could be preserved, altered, or recombined with new material in succeeding generations. Reflecting on the intersection between collective memory and hermeneutics, Eviatar Zerubavel remarks:

> The extent to which our social environment affects the way we remember the past becomes clearer when we realize that much of what we "remember" is actually filtered (and therefore initially distorted) through a process of interpretation that usually takes place within particular social surroundings. Such distortion affects the actual facts we recall as well as the particular "tone" in which we recall them.[50]

With this in mind, we may then ask how does the angle, interest or tone (to use Zeruvabel's words) evolve across these early generations of Islamic historians in their portrayals of the Islamic conquest narrative? What were Muḥammad b. Isḥāq's (d. 761) or Sayf b. 'Umar's major concerns when they wrote about the conquests, and what factors influenced the direction of their narrative? Moreover, how was their work received by later generations of historians, and how might their "re-emplotment" of these previous transmitters' material reflect their own diverse social contexts and personal interests? The following chapter is devoted to addressing these questions.

Chapter outline

This study opens with a contextual chapter whose aim is to uncover the overarching hermeneutical processes shaping the Islamic conquest narrative by describing the dynamic social, political, cultural and religious contexts and discourses that would have affected how our historians wrote about Arab-Sasanian relations. I hope to show that one witnesses a shift in perspective mirroring the concomitant eastward moving pattern of identity and political power in the early Islamic world occurring between 750 and 1050. During the early 'Abbasid era,

when an Arab-Islamic identity crystallized, and when intercultural agonism was rife among intellectuals and elites from Egypt to Khurāsān, *akhbārī*s approached these events primarily from an Arabo-centric perspective, aiming to put the Arabs on the historical map of civilizations and justify their rise over other peoples possessing a longstanding imperial heritage. Yet the universal historians whose works start to appear later in the ninth century provide a more inclusive representation, giving more depth to the Iranian role in this narrative. To this end, I plan to show that for these chroniclers, the Islamic conquest narrative represented the preliminary stage of a broader process of "salvation history" in which the people of Iran (particularly of Khurāsān) would ultimately be redeemed.[51]

How then, did Muslim historians justify the fall of the Sasanians and legitimize the Arabs as being worthy to take their place as rulers of a world empire? Chapters 3 through 7 offer an interpretative analysis of the Islamic conquest narrative in order to address this question. These five chapters are organized according to the chronological scheme of the narrative. Chapter 3 deals with the opening of the drama, analyzing accounts describing the rise of the Sasanians and their treatment of the tribes that had settled in or near their territory. It focuses on the Sasanian sovereign Shāpūr II's (r. 307–379) punitive expedition against the Arabian tribes and two similar reports (in the chronicles of al-Masʿūdī and al-Thaʿālibī respectively) of a clearly apocryphal, yet highly symbolic, dialogue between Shāpūr and an Arab elder, which portends the Islamic conquests. At this point in the drama, we are dealing with a situation where the Sasanian empire is in the heyday of its power while the Arabs are in a state of disarray. Yet, Shāpūr's meeting with the Arab sheikh(a) serves as a foreshadowing device in the narrative, alluding to a changing tide of fortune (*dawla*), which was still centuries off.

Chapter 4 brings the Lakhmids of al-Ḥīra into the discussion, examining the narrative's emphasis on the "Arab" upbringing of the Sasanian king Bahrām V Gūr (r. 420–438) as a source of his refiment and bravery, as well as the role played by Bahrām's guardian, the Lakhmid sovereign al-Mundhir I in assisting him in regaining his throne. This chapter also examines accounts of the disastrous defeat of Pīrūz I (r. 459–484) at the hands of the Hephthalites (*al-Hayāṭila*), arguing that though they were not Arabs, the Hephthalites' routing of the Sasanian army serves our narrative as a portentous precursor for later battles between the Iranians and the Arabs. Chapter 5 analyzes portrayals of Qubādh I (r. 488–496, 498 or 499–531) and Khusraw I Anūshirvān's (r. 531–579) dealings with the Arabs, highlighting the absorption of memory of the South Arabian Ḥimyarite rulers into the context of the Islamic conquest narrative. Both of these chapters make clear a plot development, in which the Sasanians are beginning to show signs of decay, while the Arabs are becoming increasingly assertive in their affairs. Furthermore, with the reign of Khusraw I, we enter into the horizon of the *Sīra* of the Prophet.

The narrative's turning point comes with the reign of Khusraw II Parvīz (r. 591–628), which is the subject of Chapter 6. I argue that the Islamic conquest narrative portrays Khusraw II as the model of royal decadence and tyranny. The

degeneration of his character is underlined in his dealings with the Arabs. Significant themes to be dealt with in this chapter include Parvīz's rescue by the Iyād tribe early in his reign, the saga leading up to his liquidation of the Lakhmid dynasty and the narrative of the epic Sasanian defeat at the Battle of Dhū Qār, which serves as a precursor in Islamic historical memory to the Arab conquest of Iran. I also analyze accounts of ominous events pervading Khusraw's final days that presage the fall of his dynasty and the rise of Islam. Chapter 7 analyzes the climax of the narrative, the Islamic conquest and liquidation of the Sasanian dynasty, and the ignominious murder of the last Sasanian ruler, Yazdagird III (r. 632–651). I provide a detailed analysis of the reports of both the pre-battle embassies (as described above) that the Muslims sent to the Sasanians, where the Arab ambassadors are made to enunciate the didactic message of the narrative, and of the epic battles themselves. This chapter also examines Islamic accounts of the Muslims' dealings with the Christian Roman empire from a comparative perspective.

A final point to make regarding this book's approach is that I am not concerned with the kerygmatic question of how early Muslim scholars sought to legitimize their faith by proving its provenance in the Abrahamic tradition. The ways in which both Judaism and Christianity have been depicted in the Islamic religious and historical traditions as forecasting the rise of Islam has already been studied in detail in other scholarship.[52] The primary focus of this study, however, centers on historical depiction across a range of sources as we examine the portrayal of the conquest of Iran by Muslim historians and the vicissitudes of Arab–Iranian dialogue from a vantage point of a later time.

Sources

In this section, I provide an overview of our most important reporters of the Islamic conquest narrative. I reserve a more detailed discussion of our historians and their respective contexts for the following chapter. The types of sources employed in this book's analysis include annalistic chronographies, conquest narratives, prophetic biographies, biographical dictionaries, and *adab*. Non-Muslim sources and archaeological data are also utilized for comparative purposes. My goal in doing so is to provide to the extent possible an accurate historical setting against which to contextualize the processes and events related by the Islamic conquest narrative. For the early 'Abbasid period, our earliest *akhbārī* is the Medinan Muḥammad b. Isḥāq (d. 767), who under the aegis of the caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754–775), composed a three-part historical chronicle. The first part (*Kitāb al-Mubtada'*) contained information on creation, biblical history, and pre-Islamic Arabia; the second section is the biography of the Prophet (*Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*); and the third is a history of the caliphs (*Ta'rīkh al-khulafā'*). Ibn Isḥāq's biography of the Prophet survives through the redaction of Ibn Hishām (d. 828),[53] but also appears through a different redaction along with his now lost conquest narrative, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* in large sections of al-Ṭabarī's chronicle and in fragments elsewhere.

The aforementioned Sayf b. ʻUmar is our main source for the Muslim annexation of Iraq and Iran, and the liquidation of the Sasanian state. Sayf composed a monograph on the *ridda* wars and the early Islamic conquests, titled *Kitāb al-Futūḥ al-kabīr wa'l-ridda*, which only exists in fragments.[54] It serves as a major source in al-Ṭabarī's chronicle, though al-Ṭabarī does not refer to this title. Hishām b. Muḥammad, better known as Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 819), a Kufan genealogist and historian specializing in Arabian antiquities, is our chief source for the Lakhmids of al-Ḥīra. However, he also wrote about non-Arab civilizations as well. Of his prolific scholarship, his *Ta'rīkh*, which contains valuable information on the pre-Islamic Arabs and Iranians is of particular interest to us.[55] Other historians I take into account from this era include the Basran genealogist and philologist Abū ʻUbayda (d. 825), who along with Ibn al-Kalbī is our prime source for the *ayyām al-ʻArab* (battle days) genre, and finally, the secretary Muḥammad b. Saʻd (d. 845), whose biographical dictionary is of paramount importance in constructing the life of the Iranian companion of the Prophet, Salmān al-Fārisī.[56]

Our earliest, extant world histories appear in the late ninth century. Of these, the Iraqi historian and geographer Aḥmad b. Abī Yaʻqūb al-Yaʻqūbī's (d. 897) *Ta'rīkh* reflects a distinctively *adab*-style humanist interest in world civilizations and a conspicuous Shiʻite bias. Appearing around the same time is the *Akhbār al-ṭiwal* of the polymath Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī (d. 895).[57] Al-Dīnawarī was the son of an Iranian convert. With his work's attempt to synchronize biblical-Islamic with Iranian legendary history, and its description of Iranian traditions like the *Nawrūz* and *Mihrjān* festivals, the *Akhbār al-ṭiwāl* serves as a prime early example of an Iran-centered genre of world history writing that became especially prominent in the following century. From this period, I will also consider the conquest narrative (*futūḥ*) of Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī (d. 892), a mid-level bureaucrat in the ʻAbbasid court and boon companion (*nadīm*) of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861).[58] Finally, we have the *Nihāyat al-irab fī akhbār al-Furs wa'l-ʻArab*, an anonymous chronicle attributed to the philologist ʻAbd al-Mālik al-Aṣmaʻī (d. 828), which is a valuable source for pre-Islamic Iranian and Arab history.[59]

Our most important source, appearing in the tenth century, is al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*, a massive compendium which focuses largely on the dynamic relationship between Iraq (particularly Baghdad) and Iran. Al-Ṭabarī was a privately supported Muslim legal scholar and theologian. Originally from Āmul, he traveled throughout the Islamic world for his scholarship, but eventually settled in Baghdad where he founded his own *madhhab* (school of Islamic jurisprudence). Reflective of his jurisprudential background, al-Ṭabarī's *ḥadīth*-style approach to historical writing was to provide multiple and often contradictory *akhbār* on one subject, sometimes analyzing their respective accuracy through his own deduction. Yet, for all his judicious analysis of *isnād*-based *akhbār*, al-Ṭabarī was not above weaving fantastic legends and incorporating moralizing tales for didactic ends, especially when it came to the themes foreshadowing the rise of Islamic hegemony.[60]

Next to al-Ṭabarī, the most prominent historian of the early-mid tenth century is the traveler Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Masʿūdī (d. 956), a Shiʿite Arab belonging to the Hudhāyl tribe. His *Murūj al-Dhahab* and his slightly shorter work, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa'l-ashrāf* reflect the humanist interests of the author, providing a wealth of information on the civilizations of the world.[61] Appearing shortly later under the Buyid emirate, we have the chronicles of Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (d. 961) and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Miskawayh (d. 1030), which both focus heavily on the history and culture of pre-Islamic Iran.[62]

The tenth century witnessed the publication of the first major Islamic histories in Persian under the aegis of the Samanid dynasty. The *amīr* Manṣūr b. Nūh (r. 961–976) commissioned the head vizier Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad Balʿamī (d. 974) to compose a Dari translation of al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*. It is not as comprehensive as al-Ṭabarī's history, but contains independent material and relies on outside texts, making it a very useful source in its own right.[63] It was also during the Samanid era that the *dihqān* (landed magnate) Abū'l-Qāsim Firdawsī (d. 1020) composed his *Shāhnāma* (Book of Kings), an epic poem recounting the history of Iran from its mythical beginnings until the Arab conquest.[64] However, the book was dedicated upon its completion to the new suzerain, Maḥmūd of Ghaznā (r. 998–1030). Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* was not the first, as there is evidence of several such named works composed in both prose in verse under the Samanids. For example, Firdawsī incorporates about 1,000 verses from the poet Abū Manṣūr Daqīqī (d. 977) on the topic of Zoroaster. Daqīqī was commissioned by Nūh II b. Manṣūr (r. 976–997) to compose a *Shāhnāma*, though his murder prevented its completion. Moreover, Firdawsī claims that he based his work on a prose *Shāhnāma* composed by the Samanid minister Abū Manṣūr Ma'marī.[65] However on this point, some modern scholars express the view that Firdawsī relied primary on an oral tradition of transmission whose roots lie deep in Iranian antiquity.[66]

Appearing slightly after Firdawsī's work, we have the Arabic chronicle of the pre-Islamic Iranian dynasties, *Ghurar akhbār mulūk al-Furs wa-siyarihim*, composed by the litterateur ʿAbd al-Malik b. Muḥammad al-Thaʿālibī (d. 1038), which constitutes one of our most important sources. Like Firdawsī, al-Thaʿālibī lived under both Samanid and Ghaznavid rule, dedicating his *Ghurar* to al-Naṣr, the brother of Maḥmūd of Ghazna. The points of similarity between these two historians' texts indicate that they share a common source, possibly Abū Manṣūr's prose *Shāhnāma*.[67]

I have reserved a separate description for works belonging to the category of *adab*. *Adab* is a diverse concept with sundry connotations, ranging from good breeding and cultivation, to applied knowledge, to a genre of pre-modern Islamic literature comprising literary miscellanies which "combined poetry and proverbs, maxims and anecdotes, and sayings of all sorts by all kinds of different people to form edificatory and entertaining anthologies."[68] These works reflect the diversity and spirit of humanistic inquiry pervading early Islamic civilization, as they incorporate literature, history, and legends stemming from the Arab, Iranian, Greek, Indian, and other traditions. Our *adab* authors of the ninth

century include the litterateurs ʻAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868–869)[69] and Muslim b. Qutayba (d. 889).[70] These scholars' writings stand out in their analysis of the pertinent discourses of their era regarding identity, ethnicity, and culture, while serving as an excellent source for pre-Islamic history as well. From the tenth century, we have the Spanish poet Ibn ʻAbd Rabbih (d. 940), whose *Kitāb al-ʻIqd al-farīd* is a fundamental source detailing pre-Islamic Arabian history, particularly the *ʻayyām al-ʻArab* accounts. Despite Rabbih's background, his work is clearly oriented around Iraq and the eastern Islamic world.[71] Finally, appearing slightly later is Abū'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 966), a student of al-Ṭabarī who thrived at the Buyid court. His *Kitāb al-Aghānī* is a masterful *adab* compendium which provides historical anecdotes and poetry of the pre- and formative Islamic Arabs, but is also a revealing source concerning the author's contemporaneous milieu.[72]

Notes

1 In this study, I use the terms "Persian" and "Iranian" interchangeably (i.e., when referring to a people as opposed to the Persian language.) Jamsheed Choksy has convincingly shown that "Iran" is more accurate since it possesses a long-standing tradition as the "Iranian" peoples' own native term of self-reference, unlike "Persian," which was conceived by outsiders like the Arabs, who noticed that in pre-Islamic times, the ruling dynasty came from *Fārs* (Middle Persian: Pārs), which is southwest Iran. See *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Iranian Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 8–9. However, this study does not aim to recreate a positivistic picture of the pre-Islamic Iranians, but rather seeks to understand how these people were imagined in Islamic collective memory (see below). To this end, *al-Furs* (the Persians) is the most common identifier of the Persian/Iranian people in early Islamic chronicles. Yet Muslim historians were also cognizant of and utlized the terms "Iran/Iranian" to describe that people/civilization as well.

2 On Sayf b. ʻUmar, see pp. 15, 161–162.

3 *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk or Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed Ibn Djarir at-Tabari* (15 vols. in 3 series) (Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901), I, 2267–2285.

4 See pp. 186–190 for an analysis of these works.

5 On this genre, see Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), XIV, 74–79; Bernd Radkte, "Towards a Typology of Abbasid Universal Chronicles," in *Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies*, vol. 3, eds. D. Jackson, W. Heinrichs, P. M. Holt, H. N. Kennedy, and L. Richter-Bernburg, 1–18 (St. Andrews: University of St. Andrews Press, 1991).

6 Aḥmad b. Abī Yaʻqūb al-Yaʻqūbī's balanced survey of world history, *Ta'rīkh al-Yaʻqūbī* (2 vols.) (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 1960) constitutes the only notable exception. However, even this historian expressed in his geographical work a clear preference for Iraq, which he sees as the center of the world, and where as he notes, once stood Ctesiphon (Arabic: al-Madā'in), the historic capital of the Sasanian empire. See *Kitāb al-Buldān* (Leiden: Brill, 1892), 233–235. Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Masʻūdī (d. 956) similarly states that one of the points of honor in the favor of the pre-Islamic Persian kings was their control of the region of Iraq. He also ranks Graeco-Roman civilization behind Iran in terms of grandeur. See *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa'l-ishrāf*, trans. B. Carra de Vaux as *Le Livre de l'avertissement et de la revision* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1896), 9. Likewise, in his world history, al-Masʻūdī's coverage of pre-Islamic Byzantine civilization is conspicuously one-dimensional as compared with that of Iran, as it

essentially covers ecclesiastical history and Christological controversies. See *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar* (4 vols.) (Beirut: Dar Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2002), I, 212–218; Nadia El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 187.

7 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Coser's work provides selections from Halbwach's *The Social Frameworks of Memory* and *The Legendary Gospels of the Holy Land*.

8 "Communicative and Cultural Memory," in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, 109, 114 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010). The intimate connection between memory and identity is a commonly expressed axiom in modern social scientific scholarship. See, in the same volume, Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," 1–15; and Alon Confino, "Memory and the History of Mentalities," 77–84. See further Kathryn Woodward, *Identity and Difference* (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 15–20ff.; Kobena Mercer, "Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford, 43–71 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990); Allan Megill, "History, Memory, Identity," *History of the Human Sciences* 11, 3 (1998): 37–62; Jeremy Schott, "Identity Politics in the Later Roman Empire," in *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 1–14.

9 "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125–133. Assmann distinguishes between "cultural memory" and "communicative memory" which comprises images resulting from everyday interactions and which is lacking in cultural content.

10 "Mnemohistory and the Construction of Egypt," in *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 1–22. Similarly, James Fentress and C. J. Wickham propose that the researcher should approach the text as a guide to determine the questions he/she should ask, since the way a society remembers and records its past ultimately reflects contemporary attitudes and the issues which it faces. Through this approach, one may thus utilize the sources to comprehend the "*mentalités*" of that particular society. See *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992).

11 *Prolegomena zur ältesten Geschichte des Islams*, in Julius Wellhausen, *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten* (6 vols.) (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1884–1899), VI, 4–7; *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*, trans. Margaret Weir (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1927), VII–XV.

12 *Muslim Studies* (2 vols.), trans. S. M. Stern and C. R. Barber (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967–1971), II, 15–274.

13 Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

14 Yehuda Nevo and Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2003).

15 The most prominent defenses of the "kernel of truth" approach include Albrecht Noth and Lawrence Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*, trans. Michael Bonner (Princeton: Darwin, 1994); Gregor Schoeler, *The Biography of Muḥammad: Nature and Authenticity*, trans. Uwe Vagelpohl, ed. James Montgomery (London: Routledge, 2010).

16 Jacob Lassner, *The Middle East Remembered: Forged Identities, Competing Narratives, Contested Spaces* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Farhad Daftary and Josef Meri eds., *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003); Angelika Neuwirth and

Andreas Pflitsch eds., *Crisis and Memory in Islamic Societies* (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg in Kommission, 2001).

17 Seminal studies, in addition to Noth's work (*The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*), include Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*; Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: Darwin, 1998); Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). On Persian historiography, see Julie Meisami, *Persian Historiography: To the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999); and Charles Meville ed., *Persian Historiography*, vol. 10 of *A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012).

18 Heather Keaney, *Medieval Islamic Historiography: Remembering Rebellion* (London: Routledge, 2013); Antoine Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir: L'espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides (v. 72–193/692–809)* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*; Jacob Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory: An Inquiry into the Art of 'Abbāsid Apologetics* (New Haven, Eisenbrauns, 1986); Tayeb El-Hibri, "The Redemption of Umayyad Memory by the 'Abbāsids," *JNES*, 61, 4 (2002): 241–265; Rudolf Sellheim, "Prophet, Chalif, und Geschichte: die Muhammed-Biographie des Ibn Isḥâq," *Oriens* 18–19 (1965–1966): 33–91.

19 Sarah Bowen Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

20 See above pp. 2─3 on scholarship demonstrating that groups tend to construct a past which legitimizes their identity by showing their cohesion and continuity through time

21 On the process of "othering," see the following note and Abdul JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, 18–23 (London: Routledge, 1995); "Other/other" and "Othering" in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, 169–173 (London: Routledge, 2000). On the connection between othering and the articulation of power, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd ed., trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1995). Finally, on Carl Jung's concept of the "shadow," see his *Man and his Symbols* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 72–74.

22 "Introduction: Who needs Identity?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, 4–5 (London: Sage, 1996).

23 E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 8.

24 Julie Meisami, "The Past in Service of the Present: Two Views of History in Medieval Persia," *Poetics Today* 14, 2 (1993): 254. On this idea, see also following note and R. N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1963), 198.

25 'Irfān Shahīd, "Theodor Nöldeke's 'Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden': An Evaluation," *IJMES* 8, 1 (1977): 118.

26 This description is derived from Marie-Laure Ryan, "Toward a Definition of Narrative," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman, 22–35 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); H. Porter Abbott, "Narrative and Life" and "Defining Narrative," in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1–27. On time and narrative, see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (3 vols.), trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), I, 3.

27 Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

On the narrative character of historical discourse, see further Louis Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, eds. Robert Canary and Henry Kozicki, 129–149 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

28 *The Content of the Form*, 44.

29 On master narratives (masterplots, metanarratives, fictions of memory, etc.), see Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 14–15; Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 46–49; Yael Zerubavel, "The Dynamics of Collective Remembering," in *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3–12; Birgit Neumann, "The Literary Representations of Memory," in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, eds. A. Erll and A. Nünning, 333–343 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010); *Erinnerung-Identität-Narration: Gattungstypologie und Funktionen kanadischer "Fictions of Memory"* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005). Donner (*Narratives*, 129–139) likewise makes use of this terminology. He defines master narratives as the "historical agenda" or "story line" that governs the make-up of the historical text.

30 *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*.

31 *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative: A Case Study in Perso-Islamicate History* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1980).

32 Standing at the forefront of these is Donner's comprehensive study (*Narratives of Islamic Origins*) of the formation of Islamic historiography, which describes the legitimizing discourses shaping early Islamic historical writing as well as the major themes and contours of this tradition. See also Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims, A Textual Analysis* (Princeton: Darwin, 1995); Thomas Sizgorich, "'Horsemen by Day and Monks by Night': Narrative and Community in Islamic Late Antiquity," in *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 144–167; "Narrative and Community in Islamic Late Antiquity," *Past and Present* 185 (2004): 9–42; "'Do Prophets Come with a Sword?' Conquest, Empire, and Historical Narrative in the Early Islamic World," *American Historical Review* 112, 4 (2007): 993–1015; Nancy Khalek, *Damascus after the Muslim Conquest: Text and Image in Early Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). See especially the first chapter "Narrative and Early Islamic History," 3–38. Nicola Clarke, *The Muslim Conquest of Iberia: Medieval Arabic Narratives* (London: Routledge, 2012).

33 See the relevant studies in Stefan Leder ed., *Story-telling in the Framework of non-Fictional Arabic Literature* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998); Philip Kennedy ed., *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005); Sebastian Günther ed., *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Angelika Neuwirth, Birgit Embaló, Sebastian Günther, and Maher Jarrar eds., *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature: Towards a New Hermeneutic Approach* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1999). Recent literary analyses focusing specifically on the Qur'an are likewise manifold, and too numerous to list in this note.

Stefan Leder is the chief proponent of the view that Islamic historical writing may be classified as fiction. He makes the case that Muslim historians employed the device of narration to pass fictional material off as real, or non-fictional. See "Conventions of Fictional Narration," in *Story-telling in the Framework of non-Fictional Arabic Literature*, 34–60; "The Use of Composite Form in the Making of the Islamic Historical Tradition," in *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, 125–148; "Features of the Novel in Early Historiography: The Downfall of Xālid al-Qasrī," *Oriens* 32 (1990): 72–96; "The Paradigmatic Character of Madā'inī's 'shūrā-Narration'," *Studia Islamica* 88 (1998): 35–54; "The Literary Use of *Khabar*: A Basic Form of Historical Writing," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, Vol. 1: *Problems*

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